

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

All THE YEAR ROUND

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MR. SCARBOROUGH'S FAMILY.

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

CHAPTER XXXIII. MR. BARRY.

"GOOD-BYE, sir. You ought not to be angry with me. I am sure it will be better for us both to remain as we are." This was said by Miss Dorothy Grey, as a gentleman departed from her and made his way out of the front door at the Fulham Manor House. Miss Grey had received an offer of marriage, and had declined it. The offer had been made by a worthy man, he being no other than her father's partner, Mr. Barry.

It may be remembered that, on discussing the affairs of the firm with her father, Dolly Grey had been accustomed to call this partner "the Devil." It was not that she had thought this partner to be specially devilish; nor was he so. It had ever been Miss Grey's object to have the affairs of the firm managed with an integrity which among lawyers might be called Quixotic. Her father she had dubbed "Reason," and herself "Conscience;" but in calling Mr. Barry "the Devil" she had not intended to signify any defalcation from honesty more than ordinary in lawyers' offices. She did, in fact, like Mr. Barry. He would occasionally come out and dine with her father. He was courteous and respectful, and performed his duties with diligence. He spent nobody's money but his own, and not all of that; nor did he look upon the world as a place to which men were sent that they might play. He was nearly forty years old, was clean, a little bald, and healthy in all his ways. There was nothing of a devil about him,—except that his conscience was not peculiarly attentive to abstract honesty and abstract virtue. There must, according to him, be always a little

"give and take" in the world; but in the pursuit of his profession he gave a great deal more than he took. He thought himself to be an honest practitioner, and yet in all domestic professional conferences with her father Mr. Barry had always been Miss Grey's "Devil."

The possibility of such a request, as had been now made, had been already discussed between Dolly and her father. Dolly had said that the idea was absurd. Mr. Grey had not seen the absurdity. There had been nothing more common, he had said, than that a young partner should marry an old partner's daughter. "It's not put into the partnership deed?" Dolly had rejoined. But Dolly had never believed that the time would come. Now it had come.

Mr. Barry had as yet possessed no more than a fourth of the business. He had come in without any capital, and had been contented with a fourth. He now suggested to Dolly that on their marriage the business should be equally divided. And he had named the house in which they would live. There was a pleasant genteel residence on the other side of the water,—at Putney. Miss Grey had suggested that the business might be divided in a manner that would be less burdensome to Mr. Barry. As for the house,—she could not leave her father. Upon the whole she had thought that it would be better for both of them that they should remain as they were. By that Miss Grey had not intended to signify that Mr. Barry was to remain single, but that he would have to do so in reference to Miss Grey.

When he was gone Dolly Grey spent the remainder of the afternoon in contemplating what would have been her condition had she agreed to join her lot to that of Mr. Barry, and she came to the conclusion that it would have been simply

unendurable. There was nothing of romance in her nature; but as she looked at matrimony with all its blisses,—and Mr. Barry among them,—she told herself that death would be preferable. “I know myself,” she said. “I should come to hate him with a miserable hatred. And then I should hate myself for having done him so great an evil.” And as she continued thinking, she assured herself that there was but one man with whom she could live, and that that was her father. And then other questions presented themselves to her; which were not so easily answered. What would become of her when he should go? He was now sixty-six, and she was only thirty-two. He was healthy for his age, but would complain of his work. She knew that he must in course of nature go much the first. Ten years he might live, while she might probably be called upon to endure for thirty more. “I shall have to do it all alone,” she said; “all alone;—without a companion, without one soul to whom I can open my own. But if I were to marry Mr. Barry,” she continued, “I should at once be encumbered with a soul to whom I could not open my own. I suppose I shall be enabled to live through it as do others.” Then she began to prepare for her father’s coming. As long as he did remain with her she would make the most of him.

“Papa,” she said as she took him by the hand as he entered the house, and led him into the dining-room. “Who do you think has been here?”

“Mr. Barry.”

“Then he has told you?”

“Not a word;—not even that he was coming. But I saw him as he left the chambers, and he had on a bright hat and a new coat.”

“And he thought that those could move me.”

“I have not known that he has wanted to move you. You asked me to guess, and I have guessed right, it seems.”

“Yes; you have guessed right.”

“And why did he come?”

“Only to ask me to be his wife.”

“And what did you say to him, Dolly?”

“What did I say to the Devil?” She still held him by the hand, and now she laughed lightly as she looked into his face. “Cannot you guess what I said to him?”

“I am sorry for it;—that’s all.”

“Sorry for it? Oh, papa, do not say that you are sorry. Do you want to lose me?”

“I do not want to think that for my

own selfish purposes I have retained you. So he has asked you?”

“Yes; he has asked me.”

“And you have answered him positively!”

“Most positively.”

“And for my sake?”

“No, papa; I have not said that. I was joking when I asked whether you wished to lose me. Of course you do not want to lose me.” Then she wound her arm round him, and put up her face to be kissed. “But now come and dress yourself, as you call it. The dinner is late. We will talk about it again after dinner.”

But immediately after dinner the conversation went away to Mr. Scarborough and the Scarborough matters. “I am to see Augustus, and he is to tell me something about Mountjoy and his affairs. They say that Mountjoy is now in Paris. The money can be given to them now, if he will consent and will sign the deed releasing the property. But the men have not all as yet agreed to accept the simple sums which they advanced. That fellow Hart stands out and says that he would sooner lose it all.”

“Then he will lose it all,” said Dolly.

“But the squire will consent to pay nothing unless they all agree. Augustus is talking about his excessive generosity.”

“It is generous on his part,” said Dolly.

“He sees his own advantage, though I cannot quite understand where. He tells Tyrrwhit that as there is so great an increase to the property he is willing, for the sake of the good name of the family, to pay all that has been in truth advanced; but he is most anxious to do it now, while his father is alive. I think he fears that there will be law-suits, and that they may succeed. I doubt whether he thanks his father.”

“But why should his father lie for his sake since they are on such bad terms?”

“Because his father was on worse terms with Mountjoy when he told the lie. That is what I think Augustus thinks. But his father told no lie at that time; and cannot now go back to falsehood. My belief is that if he were confident that such is the fact he would not surrender a shilling to pay these men their moneys. He may stop a law-suit,—which is like enough, though they could only lose it. And if Mountjoy should turn out to be the heir,—which is impossible,—he will be able to turn round and say that by his efforts he had saved so much of the property.”

"My head becomes so bewildered," said Dolly, "that I can hardly understand it yet."

"I think I understand it; but I can only guess at his mind. But he has got Tyrrwhit to accept forty thousand pounds, which is the sum he in truth advanced. The stake is too great for the man to lose it without ruin. He can get it back now, and save himself. But Hart is the more determined blackguard. He, with two others, has a claim for thirty-five thousand pounds, for which he has given but ten thousand pounds in hard cash, and he thinks that he may get some profit out of Tyrrwhit's money, and holds out."

"For how much?"

"For the entire debt, he tells me; but I know that he is trying to deal with Tyrrwhit. Tyrrwhit would pay him five thousand, I think, so as to secure the immediate payment of his own money. Then there are a host of others who are contented to take what they have advanced, but not contented if Hart is to have more. There are other men in the background who advanced the money. All the rascalism of London is let loose upon me. But Hart is the one man who holds his head the highest."

"But if they will accept no terms they will get nothing," said Dolly. "If once they attempt to go to law all will be lost."

"There are wheels within wheels. When the old man dies Mountjoy himself will probably put in a claim to the entire estate, and will get some lawyer to take up the case for him."

"You would not?"

"Certainly not,—because I know that Augustus is the eldest legitimate son. As far as I can make it out Augustus is at present allowing Mountjoy the money on which he lives. His father does not. But the old man must know that Augustus does, though he pretends to be ignorant."

"But why is Hart to get money out of Tyrrwhit?"

"To secure the payment of the remainder. Mr. Tyrrwhit would be very glad to get his forty thousand pounds back;—would pay five thousand pounds to get the forty back. But nothing will be paid unless they all agree to join in freeing the property. Therefore Hart, who is the sharpest rascal of the lot, stands out for some share of his contemplated plunder."

"And you must be joined in such an arrangement?"

"Not at all. I cannot help surmising

what is to be done. In dealing with the funds of the property I go to the men, and say to them so much, and so much, and so much you have actually lost. Agree among yourselves to accept that, and it shall be paid to you. That is honest?"

"I do not know."

"But I do. Every shilling that the son of my client has had from them my client is ready to pay. There is some hitch among them, and I make my surmises. But I have no dealings with them. It is for them to come to me now." Dolly only shook her head. "You cannot touch pitch and not be defiled." That was what Dolly said, but she said it to herself. And then she went on and declared to herself still further that Mr. Barry was pitch. She knew that Mr. Barry had seen Hart, and had seen Tyrrwhit, and had been bargaining with them. She excused her father because he was her father; but according to her thinking there should have been no dealings with such men as these, except at the end of a pair of tongs.

"And now, Dolly," said her father after a long pause, "tell me about Mr. Barry."

"There is nothing more to be told."

"Not of what you said to him, but of the reasons which have made you so determined. Would it not be better for you to be married?"

"If I could choose my husband."

"Whom would you choose?"

"You."

"That is nonsense. I am your father."

"You know what I mean. There is no one else among my circle of acquaintances with whom I should care to live. There is no one else with whom I should care to do more than die. When I look at it all round it seems to be absolutely impossible. That I should on a sudden entertain habits of the closest intimacy with such a one as Mr. Barry! What should I say to him when he went forth in the morning? How should I welcome him when he came back at night? What would be our breakfast, and what would be our dinner? Think what are yours and mine;—all the littlesolicitudes; all the free abuse; all the certainty of an affection which has grown through so many years; all the absolute assurance on the part of each that the one does really know the inner soul of the other."

"It would come."

"With Mr. Barry? That is your idea of my soul with which you have been in communion for so many years? In the

first place you think that I am a person likely to be able to transfer myself suddenly to the first man that comes my way?"

"Gradually you might do so,—at any rate so as to make life possible. You will be all alone. Think what it will be to have to live all alone."

"I have thought. I do know that it would be well that you should be able to take me with you."

"But I cannot."

"No. There is the hardship. You must leave me, and I must be alone. That is what we have to expect. But for your sake, and for mine, we may be left while we can be left. What would you be without me? Think of that."

"I should bear it."

"You couldn't. You'd break your heart and die. And if you can imagine my living there and pouring out Mr. Barry's tea for him, you must imagine also what I should have to say to myself about you. 'He will die, of course. But then he has come to that sort of age, at which it doesn't much signify.' Then I should go on with Mr. Barry's tea. He'd come to kiss me when he went away, and I—should plunge a knife into him."

"Dolly!"

"Or into myself, which would be more likely. Fancy that man calling me Dolly." Then she got up and stood behind his chair and put her arm round his neck. "Would you like to kiss him? Or any man, for the matter of that? There is no one else to whom my fancy strays, but I think that I should murder them all,—or commit suicide. In the first place I should want my husband to be a gentleman. There are not a great many gentlemen about."

"You are fastidious."

"Come now. Be honest; is our Mr. Barry a gentleman?" Then there was a pause, during which she waited for a reply. "I will have an answer. I have a right to demand an answer to that question, since you have proposed the man to me as a husband."

"Nay, I have not proposed him."

"You have expressed a regret that I have not accepted him. Is he a gentleman?"

"Well;—yes; I think he is."

"Mind; we are sworn and you are bound to speak the truth. What right has he to be a gentleman? Who was his father and who was his mother? Of what kind were his nursery belongings? He has become an attorney, and so have you. But has there been any one to whisper to him among his

teachings that in that profession, as in all others, there should be a sense of high honour to guide him? He must not cheat, or do anything to cause him to be struck off the rolls; but is it not with him what his client wants and not what honour demands? And in the daily intercourse of life would he satisfy what you call my fastidiousness?"

"Nothing on earth will ever do that."

"You do. I agree with you that nothing else on earth ever will. The man who might, won't come. Not that I can imagine such a man, because I know that I am spoiled. Of course there are gentlemen, though not a great many. But he mustn't be ugly and he mustn't be good-looking. He mustn't seem to be old, and certainly he mustn't seem to be young. I should not like a man to wear old clothes, but he mustn't wear new. He must be well read, but never show it. He must work hard, but he must come home to dinner at the proper time." Here she laughed, and gently shook her head. "He must never talk about his business at night. Though dear, dear, darling old father, he shall do that if he will talk like you. And then, which is the hardest thing of all, I must have known him intimately for at any rate ten years. As for Mr. Barry, I never should know him intimately, though I were married to him for ten years."

"And it has all been my doing?"

"Just so. You have made the bed and you must lie on it. It hasn't been a bad bed."

"Not for me! Heaven knows it has not been bad for me."

"Nor for me as things go;—only that there will come an arousing before we shall be ready to get up together. Your time will probably be the first. I can better afford to lose you than you to lose me."

"God send that it shall be so."

"It is nature," she said. "It is to be expected, and will on that account be the less grievous because it has been expected. I shall have to devote myself to those Carroll children. I sometimes think that the work of the world should not be made pleasant to us. What profit will it be to me to have done my duty by you? I think there will be some profit if I am good to my cousins."

"At any rate, you won't have Mr. Barry?" said the father.

"Not if I know it," said the daughter; "and you, I think, are a wicked old man to suggest it." Then she bade him good-

night and went to bed, for they had been talking now till near twelve.

But Mr. Barry, when he had gone home, told himself that he had progressed in his love-suit quite as far as he had expected on the first opportunity. He went over the bridge and looked at the genteel house, and resolved as to certain little changes which should be made. Thus one room should look here, and the nursery should look there. The walk to the railway would only take five minutes, and there would be five minutes again from the Temple Station in London. He thought it would do very well for domestic felicity. And as for a fortune, half of the business would not be bad. And then the whole business would follow, and he in his turn would be enabled to let some young fellow in who should do the greater part of the work and take the smaller part of the pay,—as had been the case with himself.

But it had not occurred to him that the young lady had meant what she said when she refused him. It was the ordinary way with young ladies. Of course he had expected no enthusiasm of love; nor had he wanted it. He would wait for three weeks and then he would go to Fulham again.

"TO NEXT-OF-KIN."

AN advertisement appeared not long ago in the agony column of *The Daily Paper*. "Next-of-Kin.—Two millions of unclaimed property. Firkin, Brewer, Scott, Smith, and Robertson, advertised or otherwise enquired for. Apply confidentially to Mosby and Co., Rufus Street, W.C." Now, my name being Firkin, the sight of this advertisement gave me a certain thrill of pleasurable interest. And it somehow seemed to fit in with sundry day dreams, in which the possibilities of the fuller and freer life to which wealth might furnish the passport had often presented themselves. On the shady side of thirty, with a wife and a fine lot of youngsters, it was hardly likely that I should achieve any great fortune in my own line—at least I had not begun the process. But the chance, however remote, of some wonderful inheritance unexpectedly falling in, was sufficient for the imagination to work upon; and there was just enough obscurity in the annals of the Firkin family, to furnish a vague possibility of such an event.

We are from Normandy, it is said, we

Firkins, and were originally "de Fescamp," and being Protestants, had emigrated to England at the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. That the family had once been rich and well-endowed was a tradition unsupported by any positive proof. But in my childhood I remember an old maiden aunt who told stories to that effect, and who would throw out hints that what had been lost might one day be found again. Of course this was all nonsense and illusion. But still such illusions afford more real pleasure than the contemplation of the hard and uncomfortable facts of existence, just as a bubble in its opalescent radiance delights the eye that is indifferent to the bar of best yellow in its native state. Anyhow you may see how the little seed, in the way of an advertisement in *The Daily Paper*, fell upon ground that was somewhat prepared for its reception. There could be no harm, surely, in calling upon Mosby and Co., and enquiring as to the possible Firkin who might find something to his advantage.

I was a little ashamed of my credulity as I mounted the narrow and decidedly dirty stairs that led to the offices of Mosby and Co., on an upper floor. And yet the modesty of their surroundings was, after all, reassuring. No portion of the unclaimed two millions could have stuck to their fingers. And, indeed, on seeing the person who answered to the name of Mosby, I was convinced that I had to do with an enthusiast rather than an impostor. The man was deep in the ramifications of some pedigree; his hair was uncombed; the room reeked of tobacco; and he hardly noticed my entrance in his absorption.

"Ah!" cried Mosby, when I had succeeded in attracting his attention to my card. "Another Firkin—eh! Let me see. A Firkin of Staffordshire married a Gold of Northampton, and had issue; perhaps you claim through him?" "But what was there to claim?" I ventured to enquire. "My dear sir," replied Mosby, "I can't tell you. You've been advertised for, that's all I know. And you all seem to be crowding in, so I should fancy it was a big thing. Well, hand in your name, and your father's, and grandfather's, and we'll make preliminary search; fee a guinea."

The mention of the fee had a wonderfully sobering influence on my imagination. I am extremely speculative in ideas, but when it comes to hard cash, the original cautious and sceptical Adam comes to the

front. I was quite ready to pay the man in his own coin, to promise him the most liberal percentage on any property I might acquire by his instrumentality. But our genealogist shook his head sadly over the notion. He must have solid ground to go upon. Still he felt that he might touch bottom at half the fee originally named. Upon that I replied that I would consult my friends, and Mosby, who seemed well-acquainted with this formula, dived once more into his pedigree as if he felt that I was not worth further attention.

But on my way out I met upon the stairs a man whose face I recalled as familiar. Yes, he was a neighbour, living in our street, a tailor by trade; a very respectable man, I believe, who occupied the basement of Number Sixty-eight—my number being Eighty-six, you will observe—a tailor who carried on his trade down below, while he lets out the rooms above to lodgers. I see him as I pass in the morning busy with his shears, or perhaps welding his goose in the process of ironing out seams—his bald head a shining point of light in the shaded interior. His wife, a good deal younger than he, is often at work at the sewing-machine; and there is a little girl who makes herself useful, perhaps in the process called basting. But they had not been at work on this particular morning, I remember. My friend was standing at the window, eagerly perusing a copy of *The Daily Paper*, and the last page of it, too—the agony page, while his wife looked over his shoulder with eager interest, and the little girl watched them open-mouthed. Was it possible that he, too, was interested in the two millions?

Hitherto I had said nothing to my wife about Mosby and Co.'s advertisement, or about my visit to their offices. In the first place I rather dreaded being laughed at; or, if she did not laugh at me, she would be too dreadfully in earnest, and be continually worrying me to take all kind of impracticable steps in the matter. But if ever I plan a little scheme of concealment, it is sure to break down, and the present occasion was no exception. For, coming home one day, I found my wife in full blaze of excitement over a letter which had just arrived, and which, being marked "Immediate," she had opened. As my narrative hinges a good deal on this letter I had better give an exact copy, thus:

"Rufus Street, W.C., 3rd April, 1882.

"RE FIRKIN.

"DEAR SIR.—In accordance with your instructions we have made search and taken extracts from advertisement relating to above, and herewith hand same to you.—Truly yours, "MOSBY and Co.

"To MR. FIRKIN, 68, Malbrook Street, W."

"(ENCLOSURE).—FIRKIN, NEXT-OF-KIN.

"To the next-of-kin, and all persons having any claim on the estate of Martha Firkin, late of Three hundred and Sixty-five, Belvedere Road, Lambeth, in the County of Surrey, who died at St. Thomas's Hospital. . . . Apply . . ."

"Now, what does it all mean?" asked Amy, her eyes sparkling with pleasurable excitement. "Had you given instructions? Is this a surprise you intended for me? Have we come into a fortune or something?"

At first sight of the letter I came to the conclusion that Mosby and Co. had taken upon themselves to make the search alluded to without further instructions from me, speculating only on the probability of getting their fee in the end. And I had explained all this to Amy when I suddenly caught sight of the address upon the letter—Number Sixty-eight—and recalled at the same moment the face I had seen on the stairs. The letter was not for me; the tailor of a few doors higher up must be the genuine Firkin for whom the letter was intended. He had rushed in and paid the fee of which I had been chary, and here was I complacently possessing myself of the information for which he had paid.

"But the man is not a Firkin," cried my wife disdainfully. "His name is Martin. Didn't I send a coat of yours to him the other day? But I believe," added Amy, a thunder-cloud in her eye, "that he must have found some of your letters in the coat-pocket—you are always so careless about papers—and that he means to personate you, and get possession of our property." And with that she marched off, the letter in her hand, to confront the tailor and demand an explanation.

Presently she returned, but in a less emphatic mood. The letter really belonged to our neighbour. There was no doubt about it at all. Mrs. Martin, the tailor's wife, had claimed it at once and identified it as coming from "the office"—the next-of-kin office—and about some property they expected to come in for; and as for

the name being Firkin—well, that was her maiden name, and the people at the office had made a mistake.

Now, in all this my wife quite saw the finger of Providence. The tailor's wife might be a distant connection, but the Martha Firkin whose heirs were wanted clearly belonged to us. The very eccentricity of dying in a hospital when there was money to leave behind—money enough to set lawyers and others at work to find owners for it—yes, there was something characteristic of a Firkin in all this. And then the christian-name—just the Puritanical kind of name a Firkin would be sure to have! Amy declared that she could picture the old woman in every detail, with a pinched austere face, her Bible in one hand and her bank-book in the other—not a nice person to know, but a charming one to be next-of-kin to.

Altogether, my wife infected me with a little of her enthusiasm. At all events, it would be well to get to the bottom of the matter; but then, if any expense had to be incurred, it was only fair that the Firkin family in general should take their share in it. But the Firkin family did not respond at all warmly. It was admitted that there might possibly be something in the matter worth looking into. Somebody vaguely recalled a possible Aunt Martha of a former generation; but beyond reminiscences and anecdotes bearing out the notion of the Firkin family being extremely eccentric, nothing came of it. Certainly nothing in the way of providing funds for the enquiry.

Meantime it was maddening to see the triumphant glances of the tailor every time we passed his window. He had a way of rolling his eyes round, as he looked up, that suggested his metaphorically swallowing us up. And his affairs were evidently marching bravely. Already there was a rumour in the neighbourhood of the family having come in for property. The baker had heard of it; and the milkman, who was of sporting tendencies, had, it was said, advanced a few pounds in backing their claims; while we, who were no doubt the original and genuine Firkinses, were left entirely in the shade.

And yet all this time we were within half an hour's journey of the former house of Martha Firkin; while, likely enough, her eccentricities would have left some traces in the neighbourhood. The tradesmen with whom she dealt might have preserved some memory of her. At all events,

it would be known if she had left property thereabouts; and all this information we could get without paying fees to Mosby and Co. I was glad of the suggestion, for Martha Firkin was beginning to haunt me. I saw her in my dreams, with a reproachful face, pointing downwards to buried hoards. And so one day we crossed Westminster Bridge, my wife and I, on a tour of investigation.

We approached the Belvedere Road with feelings of strong interest, and found it a wide, but rather gloomy thoroughfare, the houses of a dull red-brick, with long forecourts, many of them occupied by manufacturers on a small scale, but all in a good state of repair. It would have been encouraging to meet with a row of half-a-dozen or so with the windows all broken and a general air of grimy desertion. We should have recognised our Martha in these, and rejoiced. But nothing of the kind met our view. Then there were no shops to enquire at in the street itself, and round the corner they were all so busy and swarming with customers that it seemed almost useless to ask questions among them.

And Martha's own residence—Number Three Hundred and Sixty-five? Well, for a long time it eluded research. We marked down Number Three Hundred and Sixty-four, but after that came a long gap, and then the numbers went back to One Hundred and One. At last, however, we discovered the place, quite round the corner, and seeming to belong to the next street—a house decidedly dingier than the rest, a corner house, with three-cornered arrangements inside, no doubt, and over the door a board with the inscription, "Cassidy, Tailor."

We had agreed beforehand, in case we found Martha's house occupied, to enquire for Miss Martha Firkin, as if we were friends who believed her to be still alive. There was a certain crookedness of conduct in all this which I don't defend. We began badly, as you see. I doubt if we were justified in making use of the poor tailor's letter, which had cost him money, no doubt, without making him some acknowledgment. We were mean, I acknowledge; but then, so is everybody when once the greed of gain sets in. When we have established our claim to the Firkin estates, you will see how noble and generous we shall become.

Anyhow, we knocked boldly, with the decision of people who felt quite at home,

and the door was opened with remarkable promptness by a man in his shirt-sleeves. He bore a strong generic resemblance to our neighbour and fellow-claimant, but it was Cassidy himself, and no connection with the man in our street, who suddenly appeared to us—I fancy he had been watching our proceedings through the shop-window—and demanded our business. We enquired politely for Miss Martha Firkin.

"Yes?" replied the tailor enquiringly; "yes?"

"She lives here, I believe?"

Our firm conviction, I need hardly say, was that she was long ago safely dead and buried, and so you may judge of our thrill of horror when Cassidy replied:

"An' sure she does, and what will be your pleasure?"

"Why, to see her, of course," I stammered, quite taken aback. And then the consideration presented itself: "What on earth could we say to her?—how account for our intrusion upon her privacy?"

"I'll call her down," said Cassidy, and went to the end of the passage, a broad bare passage that opened upon an interior also bare and comfortless, but as clean and neat as the wear and tear of half-a-dozen generations would permit. "Miss Firkin, ye'll be wanted," shouted Cassidy in a voice so elevated that it was evidently intended to reach up a good many pairs of stairs.

Another consideration: if the poor old woman should turn out decrepit and rheumatic, how cruel to drag her down!

But the woman who presently appeared was anything but old and rheumatic. Not young and beautiful, indeed, but middle-aged, and with the yellow face and seamed fingers of a sempstress—evidently one who earned her bread hardly and honestly, keeping want at bay at the point of her needle, but only keeping it at bay, and never putting it to utter rout. And she stood there looking at us rather defiantly than otherwise.

Yes, her name was Martha Firkin, and what did we want with her?

"Simply," I ventured to say, "that, in fact, being of the same name, and passing that way, I thought it possible we might be connected in some way. Was it possible Miss Firkin was any relation of Joshua Firkin, my grandfather, or of Caleb Firkin?"

"Oh dear no," replied Martha sternly, "nothing of the kind. I know nothing at all about the persons you mention."

"Then, Miss Firkin," I rejoined with some severity—for I was a little nettled at the contemptuous way in which she thrust aside what I considered a very flattering suggestion—"then, Miss Firkin, pray what relation are you to the Martha Firkin who died at St. Thomas's Hospital?"

I had her there, and hit her, so to say, in naval parlance, betwixt wind and water. The woman turned pale, leant against the door-post for support. My wife gave me a nudge and whispered:

"There's a mystery here; we must fathom it."

We were standing on the steps all this time, a flight of high steps leading up to the front door, Martha standing a few feet above us in the doorway, as if to bar the passage. Beyond I could see Mr. Cassidy, his shears in his hand, eyeing the scene in strong curiosity, with furtive glances, and listening with all his ears. Martha spoke again, but slowly and with difficulty:

"I should like to know who told you anything about that."

"I will be quite free and open with you, Miss Firkin," I replied. "I saw an advertisement in the public prints—"

"Ah, that advertisement!" cried Miss Firkin. "I was afraid there would be trouble about it. Oh, and all the trouble I've had, and now—Oh, I hope there's no more coming."

The poor woman seemed so genuinely troubled and distressed that it would have been cruel to have asked her any more questions; but she presently volunteered a further statement.

The Martha Firkin in question was her mother, and she had been run over by a cab, and taken to St. Thomas's Hospital, where she died.

"And left no will, then?" asked Amy, who had followed the conversation with lively interest.

"A will! Poor mother leave a will! Why, she had nothing to leave, poor thing."

"Really, Miss Firkin," pursued Amy rather bitterly, "there's something about this we can't understand at all. If you are Mrs. Firkin's daughter, and if there was nothing to leave, why do they put advertisements in the paper for next-of-kin, giving people all kind of trouble for nothing?"

"It wasn't my doing, ma'am," cried Martha, almost ready to cry, "and I am sure I am very sorry to inconvenience any-

body ; but indeed I had nothing to do with putting in the advertisement. That was Mr. Caraway's doing."

And Mr. Caraway, it seemed, kept a shop close by in the Lambeth Road, and Martha assured us that he would give us full information. And so we parted with Miss Firkin, who watched us from her vantage point in the doorway, as did Cassidy from his window, till we had vanished round the corner.

Now Mr. Caraway's name was soon visible in gilt letters over a shop-front devoted to groceries on one side, and to the business of a post and money-order office and savings-bank on the other, and Caraway himself was discovered inside, distracted between the various duties of making up Her Majesty's mails, and making up packets of tea and sugar for Her Majesty's subjects. However, he could spare a moment for the affairs of Miss Firkin. A very creditable young woman, he said, and a seat-holder in the chapel of which he was one of the deacons. But as for the old lady who was dead he knew very little about her, only that her daughter supported her and clothed her and everything. But still the old lady had a little hoard of her own ; how she came by the money nobody knew, unless that she managed to "collar" a few pence every now and then when she went to buy things for her daughter. "But there it was," said Mr. Caraway. "Every week or two she'd bring me a shilling and pop it into the post-office savings-bank. And Miss Firkin knew nothing at all about it, not till the old lady died, when the bank-book was found, and there," said Caraway impressively, "was a matter of ten pounds laid up." Alas for our vanished millions ! Had it come down so low as this ? "And when Miss Firkin wanted to draw out her late mother's money," continued Caraway, "the Government remarked, What proof is there that the claimant is next-of-kin ? And then began a *Bother*."

Caraway made a very big B of that bother, and, indeed, seemed to have suffered a good deal between the requirements of the administration and the claims of Martha Firkin. "For whatever it might have been," pursued Caraway, "there was something wrong about her register. Perhaps the old lady had passed under a wrong name, perhaps she had never had her daughter put down. And so the Government allowed," summarised Caraway, "that if an advertisement were inserted in the

papers, addressed to next-of-kin, and no claimants appeared within three months, Martha should have the money. And Martha got it. And Martha by this time no doubt has spent it. But if there's going to be any *Bother* about it," cried Caraway indignantly, "why, I shall resign my office, that's all !"

But we hastened to assure Mr. Caraway that as far as we were concerned there should be no bother. About our neighbour, however, of Number Sixty-eight, I am not so certain. He has not looked so radiant of late, and seems to be working away to make up for lost time. And there is now a ray of suspicion in the glance he throws at me. Perhaps he has heard of my visit to the Belvedere Road, and suspects me of having made away with the Firkin millions !

THE TEACHERS' ORGAN.

WHATEVER there may be in sound, there is no bull in sense in saying that in the present day the schoolmaster is very much abroad at home. The application of the law of "must" to the elementary education of the country created an unprecedented demand for teaching power, and under the stimulus of advanced rates of remuneration the supply speedily overtook the demand ; and now once more easily—too easily the "profession" assert—keeps pace with its normal increase. The certificated teachers in actual practice—including school-mistresses as well as schoolmasters—number roundly thirty-five thousand. They may, therefore, fairly be described as a numerous body, and they are disposed to regard themselves as an important and powerful body also. Important enough to entitle their professional interests to public consideration, and powerful enough to make a good fight for their own hand where the maintenance of those interests is concerned. They have organised themselves into a "National Union," with an elaborate executive council, and a paid secretary, who is a member of the School Board for London, and, following the fashion of the day, they have established their own organ—*The Schoolmaster*. This journal is a penny weekly, and has by far the largest circulation of any educational newspaper. That circulation is, however, so exclusively professional that the paper is caviare to the general. Nevertheless, it presents many points of interest, and it is

with these that we propose to deal here, for the information and entertainment of our readers.

The Schoolmaster is emphatically and literally a journal for teachers, written by teachers. It is, moreover, edited and managed by teachers, and the general body of the teachers in the shape of an Educational Newspaper Company Limited, own it, and in it own a paying property. It is not, however, as a property but as an organ that it is chiefly valued, for the facilities and authority which it affords for making known, or putting upon record the views of the profession upon educational questions generally, and teachers' questions in particular. One of its prime uses is to ventilate grievances. In its pages, therefore, the elementary teacher appears as a much aggrieved man, a veritable Ishmaelite of the educational world. Like other trade journals it takes in a general way a "nothing like leather tone," its line being broadly that teachers as a body can do no wrong, while School Boards, or the Educational Department can scarcely do anything right. Against the Department and all its works, and more particularly all its inspectors, the teacher, as represented by his organ, has a whole quiverful of grievances. The catalogue of his complaints against the Board is a large one, and is yearly increasing. As to the "Local Managers" with whom he comes more directly in contact, as being the appointed intermediaries between the Boards and himself, it is less a case of his having grievances against them than of his regarding them as grievances personified. A considerable proportion of the whole sum of wrongs or hardships complained of centre in the one grand charge of red-tapery brought by the teachers against both Department and Boards, and especially against the latter bodies. "My lords" of the Department, and the Boards in their corporate capacity, are constantly calling for the filling in of many-columned forms, or the making out of elaborate reports or returns. This inflicts a large amount of clerical work upon the teachers, a practically endless amount, seeing that they never know what a day may bring forth in the way of new demands for "forms you know." Much of this work they allege is more or less a mere sacrifice to the Juggernaut of Circumlocution, and in this even more than in its quantity lies the sting of the "clerical work" grievance. Reams of prose denunciation of it have appeared in The School-

master, and the aggrieved teacher, like Silas Wegg, occasionally drops into poetry. Perhaps the following extracts from a rhymed lament, will convey to outsiders the best general idea of the character of the grievance here in question :

'Twas Saturday night, and a teacher sat
Alone his task pursuing,
He averaged this, and he averaged that,
Of all that his school was doing.
He reckoned percentage so many boys
And so many girls all counted,
And marked the tardy and absentees,
And to what all the absence amounted.
Names and residence wrote in full,
Over many columns and pages.
He marked who had pass'd the standard before,
And averaged all the ages.
The date of admission of every one,
With cases of flagellation,
And filled up the schedule with those who should
pass
At the coming examination.

Before half of his heavy task was done,

His weary head sank low on his book,
And his weary heart still lower,
As he thought that his pupils had little brains,
And he could not furnish them more.

He slept, he dreamed, it seemed he died,
And his spirit to Hades went,
And they met him with the question fair,
"How much can you pass per cent.?"

And when they suggested a hundred and ten,
And he modestly said "I can't,"
They changed the form of the query then,
"Can you earn the extra grant?"

He shook his head. They could hardly tell
What should be his proper position ;
But at last they gave him a ponderous book,
'Twas the Register of Admission.

He keeps the register so well, that after
many years he is, as a reward, granted a
half-holiday, which he devotes to revisiting
earth.

He came to the spot where they buried his bones ;
The ground was nearly built over,
And labourers digging threw out a skull
Once buried beneath the clover.

A disciple of Galen passing by
Paused to look at the diggers.
He picked up the skull and looked through the eye,
And saw it was lined with figures.

"Just as I thought," said the young M.D.,
"How easy it is to tell 'em,
Statistics ossified every fold
Of cerebrum, and cerebellum."

"It's a great curiosity, sure," says Pat ;
"By the bones can you tell the creature ?"
"Oh, nothing strange," said he, "that's the skull
Of a nineteenth century teacher."

When the grievance-goaded teacher does drop into poetry his verse is generally in the ironical vein. Thus, when in 1881 the Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council of Education abolished physical geography as a grant-earning science subject, and substituted for it the

new and more difficult science of physiography, the chorus of protest and denunciation in *The Schoolmaster* included the following professional effusion :

A BALLAD OF PHYSIOGRAPHY.

Oh, jumble of all 'ologies, oh, mystery intense,
Oh, hotch-potch of the sciences, oh, blunder most
immense—
Gigantic obfuscation of the light we long to see—
To limbo we devote thee, horrid Physiographie !
Dear Huxley, good professor, by whom Agnostics
swear,
Some people have abused you in a fashion hardly
fair ;
I'm not one of the number, but I fear I yet may be,
Could I feel sure 'twas you who gave us Physio-
graphie.
We deemed ourselves—well, smart enough, till
lately ; but alas !
There now exists a subject in which nobody can
pass.
Why, Aristotle's self might use some sad profanitie,
Should he attempt this year's "advanced" in
Physiographie.
And this will happen some day—I am certain that
it will—
A mummied form at Kensington an honoured niche
will fill
Within the grave museum ; and the world will rush
to see
The man who took an honours first in Physio-
graphic.
And at some not so distant date when we have
time to spare—
Some holiday when good folks all can hang around
and stare—
We'll get a jolly bonfire up and burn in effigie
That other man whose demon brain hatched
Physiographie.
God speed the good time coming that shall see an
end of cram—
The time when science teaching shall be something
else than sham ;
Meanwhile, like Annie's lover, I could "lay me
doon an' dee,"
Did I but know we'd heard the last of Physio-
graphic.

Eccentricities in the composition or conduct of School Boards are recorded in the Teachers' Organ with a sort of grim glee, as justifying an opinion current among the profession, to the effect that oftentimes members of School Boards are fitter subjects for board schools than School Boards.

The case of the Lower Halston School Board is dealt with in a tone of magisterial severity. And certainly it was a wonderful case in its way. The Chairman of the Board was, at the instance of a factory-inspector, convicted on each one of twenty-four summonses for employing boys in contravention of the Factory and Education Acts ; one of the boys so employed being the son of the attendance officer of the Board. This Board, it transpired in evidence, consisted of five members, of whom one was in the employ of the convicted chairman, while another could

neither read or write. It is only reasonable to assume that a wholly uneducated School Board member is a very exceptional personage. But to judge from the reports of board meetings reproduced from local journals in the Teachers' Organ, it would appear that ill-educated members of School Boards—members of the type more particularly hit at as being more fit for board schools than School Boards—are pretty freely scattered about. One result of this, as shown in the "records of proceedings," is the use at board meetings of a good deal of Billingsgatish language, and the misuse of the Queen's English generally, and of poor letter H in particular. When, as occasionally happens, educational ignorance is combined with educational pretension, the effect produced seems really comic to the professional mind. Thus, the speech of a member of the board of a certain manufacturing town having been termed stale, he retorted that he "would give it back" to the opposing speaker, "in the plural number, and tell him that his speech was staler."

Upon such non-official incidents, as for example that of a member of a School Board being arrested for poaching, the Teachers' Organ touches lightly and good-humouredly. But where boards or members thereof so conduct themselves in connection with their office, as to show them to be unfitted for it, the teachers, through their organ, pillory the offenders, and exclaim in effect : "And these be your (Educational) kings, O Israel ! These be the manner of men who are placed in authority over the teachers of the land." It is only fair to say that it is generally the smaller, more insignificant boards which furnish *The Schoolmaster* with the "horrid examples" of this kind, from which it points a moral. With the larger, more important boards, the organ is nothing if not critical, but its criticisms, though often strong, are generally argumentative also, and always becomingly respectful.

One feature of the Teachers' Organ is a "legal" column which is devoted to recording law cases bearing upon or interesting to the scholastic profession. Through the branches of the National Union of Elementary Teachers (familiarly known as the N. E. U. T.) the paper has correspondents in all parts of the kingdom. It is therefore in a position to bring together not merely those cases which are published in the great daily newspapers, but those also which are published only in

smaller provincial prints, or others which may not have been previously published in any paper. Cases are given of odd or conflicting decisions under the Educational bye-laws, of actions brought by teachers for wrongful dismissal, or by managers for the recovery of school-fees, or the like. But the most frequently recurring cases are the summonses for assaults alleged to have been committed by or upon teachers.

The assaults charged against teachers are held to consist in improper or excessive chastisement of pupils; in their having employed some instrument of punishment other—and more dangerous—than the cane, or used the cane with a severity exceeding the needs or objects of legitimate discipline. The assaults upon teachers are committed by hot-headed parents, who, scorning the law's delays, seek the wild justice of revenge, and attempt to "pay out" in kind, the instructors who have felt themselves called upon to thrash their children.

As a rule the so-called assaults, whether upon pupils or teachers, are slight or merely technical. Their real interest as matters for magisterial investigation lies in their bearing upon, and illustration of, the question of corporal punishment. This is a question in which the public as well as the profession is interested, and it is one upon which School Boards are not only greatly exercised, but greatly divided. There is some division of opinion upon the subject even among teachers, and it is a stock subject of discussion in the pages of their organ. There are individual teachers who say that they can and do maintain the discipline of their schools without resort to corporal punishment. The profession as a body, however, are in favour of that form of punishment, and are inclined to sneer at, to set down as "goody-goody," the dissenting few who say that it can be done without. The majority go upon the principle of the old rhyme :

Solomon said, in accents mild,
Spare the rod and spoil the child;
Be they man or be they maid,
Whip 'em and wallop 'em, Solomon said.

While children are not creatures too bright and good for human nature's daily food, while they are what they are, what on the whole it is desirable they should be—while they are thus, the cane, it is argued, must still form part of our school apparatus. Those who would abolish corporal punishment would disown only that particular form of penance, and upon them it is retorted that their remedies would be

worse than the disease. Their substituted punishment, their keeping-in, extra task-work, exhibition in the character of a horrid example, or constant lecturing, or verbal denunciation—these so-called milder methods would, it is contended, be more injurious to a child, mentally, morally, and physically, than a fair caning would be. At the same time it is admitted that the power to administer corporal punishment has been and may be occasionally abused, and it is acknowledged that it should be used as rarely and sparingly as possible. So that, the present opinion of the profession notwithstanding, we will hope that at no very distant date a day will come when teachers will be able to hang up their canes and flog no more. Meanwhile it is as well to know what are their existing views upon this much-vexed question of corporal punishment.

For outsiders the most interesting and characteristic feature of the Teachers' Organ would probably be the correspondence. The editorials of the paper are often written in the "scathing" style, but it is as a correspondent that the teacher comes out strongest. Individually the teachers are nothing if not emphatic, when discussing, in their own organ, their professional rights or wrongs—especially the wrongs. It is in the correspondence pages that the Department and its inspectors, the boards and their managers come in for their hardest knocks and names. But if the teachers speak evil of dignities, if they do not spare the officials whom they regard as their natural enemies, neither do they spare each other when they come to discuss questions upon which they are divided among themselves. Thus in a "Contributed" article, entitled, A Philosophical Study, the personal appearance and official manners and customs of one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools were elaborately criticised in the "slashing" vein. The object of the "study" was denounced as a bully, a tyrant, a pottering fidget, and was dubbed "Mr. Puzzle, H.M.I."

To the initiated this fancy name was really no disguise. The whole profession knew which particular inspector was meant, and for a week or two after the appearance of the article the correspondence columns of the organ contained a chorus of approval of the "slating" of "Mr. Puzzle." But presently there came a lull in the storm, and one teacher ventured to suggest that even "Mr. Puzzle" might not be all evil,

that probably there might be some fault or short-coming upon the part of those who failed to achieve success under his inspectorate. Whereupon the writer of the letter was severely taken to task by another correspondent who took the significant signature of "Anti-Crawler." There is an unmistakable ring of trades-unionism about this signature, and as a matter of fact the elementary teachers are a strongly trade-unionist body. It is not merely that they have their National Union, they are imbued with the spirit and ideas of unionists. How to deal with the over-supply of teaching power is a theme constantly being discussed in their organ. The numbers flocking to the profession, it is asserted, has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished, and the Education Department is greatly blamed for affording what its critics call side entrances to the teacher's calling.

Even among the certificated there are teachers, and teachers. Teachers who are "trained and certificated," and teachers who are only certificated. The former class are those who, in addition to having served their articles as pupil-teachers, have been through a training college. The latter are ex-pupil-teachers, or "acting" teachers, who have sat for their certificate examination under conditions arranged by the Education Department, to meet the circumstances or views of those who lack either the means or the inclination to obtain college training. The trained assume not only that they are the most fully and legitimately commissioned teachers, but also that they are, that they of necessity must be, the best teachers. This last assumption, the untrained, the side-entrance, men dispute. They argue that two years spent in actual practice as assistant-teachers is to the full as good training as any that can be acquired during an equal period of semi-monastic life in college. This quarrel of trained versus untrained is a very pretty one as it stands, and we merely cite it here as being a subject upon which the teachers in their own organ come out strong.

The correspondence columns of the organ are not, however, wholly devoted to the discussion of vexed questions. They serve for the setting forth of all sorts of odd or individual grievances, as, for instance, that of the teacher who writes to complain that his butter comes from his tradesman wrapped in used "Forms Forty"—Form Forty being the form upon which applications for employment

as teachers under the London Board are made, and in which the official—and to a certain extent the private—history of applicants is recorded in great detail. Again it serves to bring under the notice of the profession generally appeals for help for individual members overtaken by special misfortune. Another use to which the correspondence portion of the organ is put is that of warning teachers at large against impostors, who are working, or attempting to work, the teaching profession. As such warnings describe the personal appearance and modus operandi of the particular performer denounced, they generally have the effect of spoiling sport for him, and in one instance at any rate such a warning led to the sharper being laid by the heels, as the following characteristic letter from a village dominie will testify :

"AN IMPOSTOR CAUGHT."

"SIR,—I wish to acknowledge my thanks to the writer of that letter which appeared in your issue a few weeks back, cautioning teachers against an impostor. This same impostor presented himself at my school amongst others in this district, and told his tale. He little thought, however, that as he tried to pour it down my throat, our worthy policeman, who had been placed on his track, was swallowing it all through the key-hole. He was at once taken into custody, and received the well-deserved sentence of seven days' hard labour.—Yours truly."

The metaphor here is perhaps not a very happy one, seeing that a tale is rather taken in by the ear than poured down the throat; but the touch of "our worthy policeman" seems to us almost worthy of the Vicar of Wakefield.

The Teachers' Organ has its weekly announcements of births, marriages, and deaths; and when the teachers named in them are trained, there is added to the information usually given in such announcements, their college, and years of residence in it. In this way, old college chums hear of each other again in after-life, and recollections of college friendships and college adventures are revived. Following the births, marriages, and deaths, comes a "Presentation" column, in which are recorded the presentations made to teachers, on their marrying, obtaining promotion, changing school, retiring from active service, and the like, and here again old friends or competitors obtain passing glimpses of each other's progress in life.

In addition to these features, the organ likewise briefly reports the festive as well as the official gatherings of teachers in all parts of the country. It will be seen, therefore, that it has a social as well as a technical interest for the teaching profession.

Did space permit, some curious bits might be culled from the advertisement pages of the Teachers' Organ. Here, however, it must suffice to say that the advertisements—which are very numerous—consist chiefly of "Situations Wanted," "Situations Vacant," and announcements of new books and other school apparatus. Could the latter class of advertisements be taken without a grain of salt, the old saying that there is no royal road to learning might well be regarded as obsolete. But, alas! advertisements are but—advertisements. The road to learning, though perhaps smoother than of yore, is still a thorny one, the multiplication and improvement of mechanical means of education notwithstanding.

To the elementary teachers of the kingdom their organ is a valuable possession. It has done yeoman's service alike to them and to the cause of that popular education with which they are practically associated. As a work of their own creation, they have reason to be proud of it, while the outer public would find it more attractive—less purely shoppy and more generally interesting—than most other trade organs.

WAITING.

A STORY IN TWO PARTS. PART I.
CHAPTER II.

"YOU are sure, quite sure, Steph; that the poor young man is altogether quite well, it seems heartless to doubt it, after his perilous escape—but do you feel positive that he is a gentleman?"

Mrs. Stephen Northlington was reposing on a wicker-work sofa, which had been placed on a shady spot on the lawn. She was splendidly dressed in an embroidered muslin gown, rings sparkled on her fingers, and the daintiest of lace caps was perched on her pretty brown curls. Stephen, peacefully blowing curls of smoke into the air, was seated on a comfortable chair at her side, while a few yards off, her two small sons—one of whom could only just walk alone—were chasing Aunt Dora round the flower-beds.

Stephen was in that calm self-satisfied

frame of mind not uncommon among prosperous people with whom the world wags merrily. He had just had a thoroughly satisfactory interview with his bailiff, who had made a first-rate bargain about fat beasts. The weather was lovely, even the bailiff had not been able to grumble at the state of the crops; the young fellow down at Turner's was going on well; and his (Stephen's) cigar was of a peculiarly fragrant and aromatic quality.

Mrs. Stephen had a faint high-pitched voice and a trick of emphasising a word here and there.

"Are you quite sure, Steph?" she asked again, as she received no immediate answer to her question.

"Oh yes! I beg your pardon, my love." Stephen put down his cigar and was all attention. His thoughts had been dwelling on his conversation with the bailiff. "The young artist, you mean—what's his name? I've quite forgotten. Dalton, I think Turner said it was; and he did tell me himself. A gentleman? Yes; I should say so decidedly, though he tells me he is an artist by profession—some connection of my old tutor's up at college. His relations live in the north, and put him into iron works, or cotton, and he couldn't stand it. Don't wonder, I'm sure," continued Stephen, with his fingers in his waistcoat-pocket; "terribly dull career for a young fellow of good family."

"Then he is of good family?"

"Yes, by all means; his father was—upon my word, Fanny, it's escaped my memory what his father was, but it doesn't much matter, you'll be able to talk to him yourself when he comes to stay for a few days."

"I'm really relieved," said Fanny in her bird-like tones, "to hear that he is a gentleman. It might have been so bad for the children if he had not been quite—quite—you understand—the example."

"I don't suppose he'll find his way to the nursery," observed Stephen soothingly.

"No, not that; but the general tone. Children are so quick to pick up and observe anything fresh, especially boys. It was only yesterday that little Steph asked nurse—"

"I beg your pardon, my dear, but can you see who that is talking to Dora over the sunk fence? I believe it's Turner, and I have a dozen things I want to tell him about the new flower-beds. Your eyes are much better than mine."

"I rather think it is too tall for Turner.

But any way he has gone round to the gate, so I suppose he is coming in."

"Very likely. By-the-bye, my dear, do you believe that Wyatt will remember to speak about those plants before he leaves town?"

In the meantime Dora and her nephews had made themselves thoroughly hot and tired with running, so they sat down to rest on a bank that looked towards the sunk fence. On the other side of the hedge was a hay-field, through which a narrow path had been made by the people who came from the village to The Chestnuts.

Dora wore a light summer dress. She had dropped her hat at an early period of the game, and her hair had been decorated by the busy fingers of little Stephen. Having stuck a spray of geranium on either side of her head, Stephen sat down to rest with his arm round Aunt Dora, coaxed into good behaviour by the promise that she would tell him the story of the three bears.

"Once upon a time——" began Dora.

"Baby's going to sleep," interrupted Stephen.

"Never mind, baby is too little to care about stories; wait till he's quiet, and then I'll begin."

Stephen waited for perhaps two minutes, then burst out with:

"Aunty Dora, begin; baby's 'sleep."

"No, no; no sleep," shouted baby, sitting bolt upright on Dora's lap with preternaturally wide-open eyes; "me 'wake."

"Then I'll sing you a little song instead of telling you a story, and baby will like that too."

"Yes," said baby, while Stephen, perfectly satisfied, sidled still closer to Aunty Dora, and put a hot little hand out to pat her face.

Dora began valiantly, considering the difficulties of her position, and sang straight through a series of nursery rhymes:

"Queen Anne, Queen Anne, she sits in the sun,
As fair as a lily, as——"

"Aunty Dora!" exclaimed Stephen, whose h's were slightly erratic, "there's a man looking over the 'edge, his arm's tied up."

Dora looked up quickly. A young man with a stick and his arm in a sling was standing in the hay-field contemplating the little group with serious eyes; a tall slight man with delicately-cut features and a small silken beard; he wore his hair rather

long; his necktie was not of a conventional cut.

"The invalid artist, of course! How silly of me to forget that he was coming to call to-day!"

The stranger raised his hat, and paused, uncertain whether he should address the young lady, or find his way round to the front door.

Dora blushed crimson, becoming conscious of her crumpled dress and untidy hair; she struggled to her feet, baby still in her arms, and Stephen clinging on to her dress.

Something in the graceful attitude, and in her excessive embarrassment, caused the stranger to linger by the hedge, while little Stephen broke the ice by shouting:

"Who are you, man?"

"Hush, Steph!" said Dora; "that is not the way to speak at all."

"I really must apologise for disturbing you, it was quite unintentional," he said in a clear musical voice. "I'm afraid I am trespassing here, but I understood from my good friend Turner that this was the short-cut to The Chestnuts."

"You are perfectly right. There is a gate a few yards lower down; if you will go straight on we will open it for you."

"Not for the world. Do not let me trouble you, I shall find my way."

He raised his hat again, and walked on, while Dora took herself to task for her ungraciousness, and Stephen announced calmly in his ringing tones: "Man gone, now aunty must sing." But there was no more singing for little Steph that afternoon, nor could he persuade Aunty Dora to sit down again on the grassy bank. No, they must all go in and have tea.

"Man back again," said he, before they had gone many steps towards the house, and this time Dora stopped for the stranger to come up to them, and held out her hand.

"My brother will be so pleased to see you," she said shyly; "he was—we all were so distressed to hear of your mishap. I do hope you are better."

"Indeed I am, thanks to all the kindness I have met with. I wish I could have come before to express my thanks to Mr. Northlington. Have I the pleasure of addressing Mrs. Northlington?"

He did not think so for a moment, having already heard many minute descriptions of the family from Mrs. Turner's garrulous lips, but he hazarded the remark in hopes of calling up another blush on the

face of this lovely Queen Anne, who sat singing in the sunshine, utterly unconscious of effect, with a small boy on either side of her, and a bunch of scarlet in her hair.

"No; my sister-in-law is in the garden just above, and my brother too. There, Steph, go and tell papa that Mr. Dalton is here."

"May I be allowed to ask your name?"
"Dora Northlington."

She looked up, it was impossible for her to avoid seeing the admiration that was written in Walter Dalton's eyes. They were beautiful eyes, dark and dreamy, and his face was that of an intelligent man.

His next observation was commonplace enough.

"What a charming place this is, Miss Northlington. I have been so much indoors the last week or so, that it is a real pleasure to be walking under the green trees again; you can sympathise with a painter's feelings, I am sure."

"I don't paint at all," murmured Dora; "but—"

"You are very happy in not doing so," interrupted Walter Dalton, who, in truth, much as he liked listening to the conversation of a beautiful woman, still better loved the sound of his own voice. Had he not for three long weeks been deprived of an appreciative audience? For three long weeks he had been cut off from all intercourse with cultivated minds, for, in his notion, the country doctor was but a rural savage, and in the hurried visits of Stephen Northlington he had hardly found a sympathising element. "I am sure you have a mind that can feel and grasp the beauties around us more vividly than we poor workers, who in the end often realise the impossibility of the task we undertake in trying (however humbly) to paint Nature."

Walter put out his hand as he spoke towards baby, who was gazing at him with wide-open blue eyes from the safe shelter of Aunty Dora's arms; he had singularly beautiful hands, white and shapely, the one in the sling was helpless, and a slight awkwardness in moving his left hand made it the more conspicuous.

"Ah, baby! you don't understand these grand sentiments, do you? What a fine little fellow he is, Miss Northlington; I should adore him if he belonged to me!"

Walter Dalton was as unconscious of any insincerity in this speech (though he barely knew the names of his own nephews and nieces) as in the other, when he had given Dora to understand that humility was the

stepping-stone by which he hoped to aspire —he, in whose character was no particle of that most desirable quality. His whole life (not such a very long one, for he was only twenty-four) had been given up more or less to pleasing and admiring (in the absence of other worshippers) that talented young man, Walter Dalton. His creed was very simple, and his vanity so complete that it did not at first appear as being the back-bone (as indeed it was) of his character.

On the other hand, he had quick passions; a great love for everything that was graceful and pleasing; he was easily touched, and at the present moment the feeling uppermost in his mind was gratitude for the kindness which he had received from the Northlington family, not unmixed with joy at having escaped from the hands of Mrs. Turner.

He had been gifted with a beautiful face and a soft voice, which made even his most ordinary observations sound as if there were a great deal more behind. He was young, he had narrowly escaped a very severe accident, and, although she did not know it, he was bent upon pleasing her. Was it not, therefore, natural that Dora, who had passed her life among such very different types of humanity, had already come to the conclusion that this Walter Dalton was an exceedingly interesting personage? At any rate he had the knack of making himself at home. Long before afternoon tea was over, Fanny had begged him to stay to dinner, and had cordially seconded her husband's invitation that he should spend the next week or so at The Chestnuts.

Stephen hustled about and brought out more cigars, but Mr. Dalton did not smoke. At least only now and then, not as a habit.

"If you will let me," he said, when Fanny had retired to rest after the fatigues of the day, "I should very much like to look round this exquisite garden of yours."

Praise of his garden was the sure road to win Stephen's heart, and he rose from his seat with alacrity, pointed out the recent improvements, and discussed the shape of the new flower-bed with his visitor, till he was called away to talk to Turner on urgent business.

"I must leave you to Dora," he said, with a half apology, "but she knows all about the garden, horticultural names, and everything, as well as Turner does himself; she is quite my right hand."

It did not appear that Walter's interest

in the science of botany was so very absorbing after all, for he soon turned away from the greenhouse, and begged his companion to take him somewhere out-of-doors where he could sit down and see the view.

"Take me to your favourite seat, I'm sure you have got one. Nobody could live in this enchanting place without fixing upon one particular spot, in which to sit and think."

"I like the fir-trees best," said Dora, "down behind the summer-house, if you can walk so far."

"To be sure I can, and there is no occasion to hurry; that is just the charm to an over-worked Londoner, the being able to rest, and be supremely peaceful as we can here."

Stephen had planted the fir-trees at George Wyatt's advice to shelter the garden from cold winds. Now they had sprung up tall and strong, and Dora had begged for a seat just at the edge of the plantation, from which she could see the sweet-smiling valley and catch a glimpse of the red walls of Trevden Hill. It faced the west, and Dora called it "Sunset Corner."

"This is truly delightful," murmured Walter, with his back against a handsome spruce fir.

"I remember, I remember
The fir-trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky;
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy,
To know I'm further off from heaven
Than when I was a boy.

What would I give to have written that! Do you like poetry, Miss Northlington?"

"Yes," answered Dora, rather as if she considered it a taste to be ashamed of.

"I was certain you did. Hark! what a lovely sound that is among the roses—'the murmuring of innumerable bees.' Did it ever strike you that there is—there must be—a line of exquisite English to illustrate every sight that enchanteth us, every sound that we hear? Only life is not long enough to fairly grasp the thought. You are musical, too, Miss Northlington. I can see it in your face. Will you sing to me by-and-by?"

"I will with pleasure, but I have only had a few lessons."

"That does not signify if you have the love of music in your heart; and I heard you singing to your little nephews as I

came through the hay-field. Will you talk to me a little, and tell me about this charming idyllic life that you lead here?"

It did not strike Dora that hitherto there had not been much opportunity for her to talk, insomuch as Mr. Dalton had monopolised the whole of the conversation, nor was she in any way embarrassed by his strange request.

"We came to The Chestnuts about eight years ago, when I was a little girl, and till last summer I always did my lessons—not very regularly, though, as Fanny is an invalid, and Stephen often wants me. We don't go out very much in the summer, except, of course, to Trevden Hill. You can see it, can't you? That's partly why I love Sunset Corner, because you can see the house, and I think it is the most beautiful place in the world."

"Is that where Mr. Wyatt lives?"

"Yes. He is our oldest and best friend. It would be dull for me sometimes if he weren't here. He taught me to ride, and he brings me new books, and once he invited a friend of his to stop—an Italian—on purpose to give me singing-lessons."

"Mr. Wyatt was most civil in calling upon me after my accident," observed Walter in a matter-of-fact tone, rather as if he were bored by this account of Mr. Wyatt's perfections.

"He always is kind, and he was so distressed about you! He's away now in London, but we expect him back again very soon."

"Oh! By-the-bye, Miss Dora—will you forgive me for calling you so? It seems as if we had known each other a very long time—I believe I have something in my pocket-book that may amuse you."

He produced a long thin sketch-book, and showed her a cleverly-drawn sketch of Mrs. Turner, with her most lachrymose expression of countenance.

"You know who it's meant for?"

Dora clapped her hands, and declared it to be an excellent likeness; then she asked to see another drawing, and that proved to be a sketch of the house where his uncle, the iron-founder, lived.

"An old Goth," explained Walter as he turned over the leaves with his left hand, "who is furious with me because I did not like his business. Imagine to yourself, Miss Dora, what it would be for me to sit in an office all day, surrounded with chimneys, and to come home to my villa residence, 'pricking a Cockney ear,' to find a wife without an 'h' awaiting my arrival."

"Stephen told us something about it," said Dora, to whom this picture appeared terrible indeed; "but I hoped—we all thought that you had decided upon being an artist. You must be very clever, to be able to draw those lovely little sketches."

Walter bowed.

"I have chosen another path, certainly, but it is quite a question whether I shall succeed. I am a most unfortunate man, Miss Dora. You are so kind that I don't mind telling you that my picture was rejected by the Academy this year. Then I went abroad for a short time." He omitted to say that the foreign trip was a suggestion of the hard-hearted uncle, who had sent him a handsome cheque to defray expenses. "After that I came down into this neighbourhood to sketch, and got run over by the estimable Turner, though I look upon my accident as one of the happiest occurrences of my life."

All this was said in the sweet low voice which Dora found so attractive; she hardly knew what to answer, so she stooped over a rather more finished pencil-drawing—the head of a girl with a low forehead, large eyes, and a simpering mouth—and asked Mr. Dalton who it was.

"That thing?" he said, taking the book out of her hands; "it's too absurd to show you that; it is a fancy head, I did it yesterday afternoon."

"It's a pretty face, but it looks rather silly," observed Dora.

Walter Dalton burst out laughing.

"You are perfectly right, it is silly; I will do a better one to-morrow."

"It is a portrait then?"

"No, not exactly; it is a sketch of a young lady I hear our good Mrs. Turner talk about constantly; in fact, it is what I imagined Miss Dora Northlington to be like, until I had the pleasure of being undeceived."

"How very tired you must be of hearing about me!"

"I admit that I was a little tired of Mrs. Turner's description—singularly wide of the mark it was—so I amused myself with scribbling caricatures. It is sad to think how very unlike they were! I should like to paint you now as you are," he went on with head thrown back, looking at Dora in his dreamy way, as if she were a part of the landscape, "with the fir-trees in the background, and the geraniums in your hair."

"Wouldn't it be better to have fresh ones?" asked Dora with a smile. "I had

forgotten that they were there; little Stephen put them in when we were playing horses hours ago."

"I would not touch them on any consideration; the colour is perfect. Will you give me a sitting to-morrow morning, Miss Dora?"

"When you get quite well, I will; but you ought not to think of using your hand for a long time. Shall we go towards the house now? Fanny will be vexed if I keep you out too long, and Dr. Brown will come and scold to-morrow."

It was very delightful to Walter Dalton to be looked after and cared for in this way by a pretty girl; he almost went the length of wishing that he had been more seriously hurt. It would be very dull in his Kensington lodging after this comfortable country home-life. On the whole he thought that he would not get well too fast.

By the time that George Wyatt returned home, and paid his customary evening visit at The Chestnuts, Walter Dalton was established there as a most welcome guest. He had won the goodwill of both host and hostess, who declared that they had never had a visitor who gave less trouble. He had dropped into their ways from the very first day, and, though he did not seem to be up to much in the walking and riding line, he was never bored, and had always something pleasant to say at dinner about what he had seen and done during the day.

And Dora? She was supremely happy; in her sympathy for the invalid she gave herself boundless trouble to entertain him; a man with a broken arm was so helpless, and then how patient and good he was! She could not help thinking how much more difficult it would have been to amuse Stephen, supposing he were incapacitated in the same way. She devised all kinds of schemes for making the time pass pleasantly for her guest; she was the most unselfish and untiring nurse, running up and down stairs to fetch him books, and singing to him by the hour together; she mixed his paints, and washed his brushes when he would try and paint, and even consented to sit for her portrait as "Queen Anne," scarlet geraniums and all, though this was a process that invariably made her feel shy and uncomfortable. Can we wonder that, long before the roses reached their prime, before Stephen's improvements were finished, or the broken arm entirely healed, simple child-like Dora had drifted slowly but surely into such a deep

friendship for her handsome patient, that when one morning he broke out into passionate utterances of his undying love for her, she put her hands into his, and vowed that she would love him, and him alone, all the days of her life?

"I don't deserve it," she whispered, as they stood together by the gate at the end of the garden; "teach me to be worthy of you. You are so clever and know so much, how is it that you love me?"

How was it? Could he not describe to her the charm of her sweet face with the glorious eyes that were looking at him now so earnestly; could he not tell her how he had learnt to watch for her coming and going; how, in these few short weeks, he had discovered a treasure in the quiet country house, which was such a contrast to his London life? No! of all this he knew nothing. That (as far as it was in him) he really loved Dora, there could be no doubt. He was touched by her devotion and humility, but he had no answer to her question; with all his love, and all his sympathy, he accepted the homage as a matter of course. She was a simple country girl, beautiful—ah, very beautiful!—but it may be that if she had not been so thoroughly aware of his own great qualities he might not have found it out.

They were very happy, walking backwards and forwards on the turnpike-road; making plans for the future when Walter was to be recognised as the great artist and poet of the day; and building innumerable castles in which Walter was to reign supreme, with Dora in the background as a peaceful shadow. He found it quite in the order of things that she should thus place him in the front, and, as for her, she was quite content. To know that he loved her was enough. Up and down they strolled under the shelter of the high hedge, regardless of passing market-carts and labourers, till a clatter of hoofs caused Dora to look up and exclaim:

"There's Mr. Wyatt! I wonder why he doesn't stop at the house."

"He appears to have some important business in hand," observed Walter carelessly, as George Wyatt passed at a quick trot along the lane that led to Trevden Hill, only just raising his hat to Dora by way of salutation.

"Yes, he is always so busy. Stephen says he doesn't know what the people about here would do without him."

"Does he? Now tell me, dearest, what do you think Stephen will say to this

engagement of ours? Must we tell him just at present?"

"Why not?" asked Dora; "he is very fond of you, I know. Only yesterday he said he wished you would come back for the shooting. He is my guardian, you know."

"And consequently might perhaps object—eh, lady fair? We must be sensible, mustn't we? I am afraid," continued King Cophetua, "whether you might not change your mind if Brother Stephen told you so. Dora!" he exclaimed vehemently, "tell me, promise me that whatever they say, whatever this Wyatt says, shall not make any difference to you?"

"Walter," there was the least possible hesitation as she called him by his Christian-name for the first time, "I promise you that it shall not. I have told you so before, and I should like you to understand. I should like you really to believe—"

"What is it, darling?"

"I can never change, whatever happens. I shall always love you, always."

Her voice faltered in her earnestness, and the large tears rolled down her cheeks, but they were soon stopped as Walter swore that he believed her, that he would not distress her for the world. So, arm in arm, they two walked past Sunset Corner and the fir-trees where they had sat and talked four short weeks ago.

GEOFFREY STIRLING.

BY MRS. LEITH ADAMS.

PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER VII. MRS. BUNNYCASTLE'S LANDLORD.

IT may be safely said that the people who had no money in Becklington Bank enjoyed themselves very much at this time. They had their fill of amazement; they breakfasted, dined, teaed, and supped upon excitement and wonder, and many of them lay awake far on into the night, busy with anticipation of still further marvels to come. That the monotonous surface of life in a country town should be so ruffled was a fact not wholly devoid of pleasure; but even the most rapacious after some new thing were ready to cry, "Hold—enough!" when the suicide of Gabriel Devenant followed so promptly upon the bank robbery. Of course the one

event had grown out of the other. The weak mind of the gloomy recluse had been unable to face calamity. He had become a deserter from the battle of life, lacking courage to meet the enemy.

Jake, feeling that after a day of tearing excitement the mind of man required to be soothed by the contemplation of rural and domestic objects, was stepping (backwards, and in imminent danger of running up against someone) across the market-place the better to observe his fantailed pigeons strutting on the roof, their conceit in no wise diminished by the fact of their feathers being more or less sooty, when the boy suddenly bolted into view with his mouth wide-open, and his eyes like a young lobster's.

"Maister Devenant's been and made away with hisself i' the noight, drownded hisself dead i' the 'big dyke. His missis pult 'im out, and down hoo come to old Betty Higgens' abeatin' wi' her hands upon t' door like as if it were a droom. Hoo caught Jem Higgens by t' yure o' his yed and tel't him as she'd knock t' loife out of him if he didn't run and fetch Dr. Turtle that directly minute, aye, did hoo; and two lads from Higgens's farm laid hold on a shutter and went along wi' her, and her struck dumb-like and mum-like, and holding on to herself loike as she was about to fall i' pieces; and Dr. Turtle he come, dressed ony kind of a way loike t' scarecrow i' our back garden, and runnin' same as if old Matthew were after him for robbin' an orchard," said Abel with a gulp, drawing on his personal experiences for an illustration; "but he couldn't do nothin', and Maister Devenant's leein' stiff and stark; and Bill and Bobby set their noses agen t' windoo, but could't see nothin' for t' bloind, and Softie he caught 'em by t' lug and wallop'd 'em—ay, that did he."

"Served 'em right, too, the varmints," said Jake, "and t' same 'ull be served out to you if you don't get to your work and look sharp about it."

Jake positively refused to be astonished by anything the Boy could tell him. He had, therefore, during the recital of Gabriel Devenant's lamentable end kept his eyes studiously fixed upon his pigeons; and now, for the first time, brought his vision down to bear upon Abel's excited countenance. He even hummed a stave of a Methodist hymn to show how thoroughly cool he was, and how calmly ready he was to receive the news of any other calamity that might have happened in Becklington

during the night as though it were his daily food.

Abel, not a little crestfallen, retired into the back parlour. Jake pushed his brass-rimmed spectacles up to the top of his head, shoved his hands into his pockets, and lounged across the pavement to greet a passing neighbour.

"Is this true what I hear about Maister Devenant?" he said composedly.

"Aye," replied the man; "he's gone to his long home sure enoo', and a damp road he took to 't too. It's all along o' the terrification over t' bank robbery as this has come about. He couldn't face the thing, couldn't Maister Devenant."

For all this show of calm composure, Jake's soul within him was in a ferment of amaze and pain. He had lived in Becklington, boy and man, for nigh upon fifty years, and never known such a time of seething tumult. Who might know whether these stormy portents did not point towards the end of all things and the near approach of the Battle of Armageddon?

Jake took a furtive glance at a certain old and rusty matchlock that was pinned against the wall of the back parlour over the mantelshelf.

True, the kind of arms to be used at the great encounter was a moot point with divines; but it was well to be on the safe side, to keep your spiritual armour bright, and at the same time have some trusty carnal weapon handy.

Abel, catching the furtive glance, and following it, was of a mind to think suicides were the order of the day, and that his master was on desperate thoughts intent. He had much ado to prevent blubbering outright as this frightful suggestion crossed his mind, for Abel loved his little master in spite of all the scolding and ear-pulling that came as part of the day's work, and had been known to challenge young Becklington in the matter of producing "a better soart," or one who sang hymns "wi' a bigger stummick."

It was a relief to Abel when his master went leisurely out of the shop, and out of sight, leaving the matchlock behind.

Gradually Jake quickened his footsteps until he broke into a sort of gentle trot.

He did not take the way that so many were going who had, or could make, an hour to spare; he did not go to stare at the shrouded window of the house among the dykes; he did not go and hang around as many did in the hope of seeing the

authorities arrive to hold enquiry into the circumstances of Gabriel Devenant's death.

He took quite an opposite direction, towards what was called the old town, a crowded district running out in little lanes of very humble dwellings, and dominated over by a big windmill royally seated on an eminence, whirling his big sails round and round as relentlessly as though they formed a wheel of fate and were making or marring the lives of men.

When Sunday came, and the sails were still, a Sabbath stillness seemed to be over everything; a line drawn definitely and broadly between the week-days and the day of rest. The miller was of the Methodist persuasion, and looked upon by that body as a man of weight; whereas Jake (a zealous member of the same sect) was regarded as a man of energy, and—as is, alas! often the case with great men—the two had more than once, to the secret satisfaction of the less eminent, shown signs of mutual jealousy and distrust.

The miller was a strict Sabbatarian, and, on a Sunday, if he looked at the mill at all, he looked at it as if he rather thought it belonged to some one else. Nor would he tolerate the most delicately-veiled allusion to business on the "seventh day;" which did not, however, prevent him driving the hardest of bargains on other days.

He owned many of the houses round about the mill, and was looked upon as a "stiff'un" in regard to rent; in fact you were esteemed wise to save your breath to cool your porridge—if you had any to cool—rather than waste it in entreaties for gentle dealing from the miller, you being unfortunate enough to find yourself in his power.

Now Mrs. Bunnycastle, the shabby widow of whom we have spoken, lived in one of these little houses near the mill, and owned the miller as a landlord, and it was thither, all breakfastless as he was, that Jake had betaken himself so hurriedly. It would perhaps be hard to say why the story of Gabriel Devenant's death had thus induced him to leave the boy to play the mischief with the coffee and run to unhallowed excess in buttering the toast; maybe the remembrance of the drawn white face beneath the widow's cap had set him wondering if this one too might not find life a thing too hard and cruel to be endured.

Anyway, here he was, his apron flapping in the breeze and concealing all deficiencies in the way of legs, as he came up the gentle incline that led towards the mill.

"Has noo dot any more jam pies, Mr. Toomaker?" cried the youngest and smallest child, toddling to meet him as soon as she espied him.

"Patch" no doubt would have reproved this grasping spirit in his little sister, but that he had enough to do to hold on tight to his mother's hand and look up earnestly into her face, as she stood opposite a tall whitened figure that looked many sizes too big for the tiny room. Every time the miller (for it was he) stirred hand or foot, little grains of flour fell from his clothes, as if he was a gigantic snow-man and about to melt.

But there was little else of the melting mood about the miller.

He had stepped round to remind his tenant that it chanced to be rent-day—as if there was any chance of her forgetting a fact with which she had been keeping vigil face to face through the long sleepless hours of the night.

"I know it is rent-day," she said, trembling as she spoke; "I should have gone to the bank to draw the money this very morning. I should, indeed, if it hadn't been——"

"That's as you like, Mrs. Bunnycastle," said the miller, making quite a small snow-storm of himself as he walked to the window, nodded to Jake, and whistled a stave of Rule Britannia between his teeth. "I don't care where people keep their money as long as they don't keep it from them to whom it's justly doo," he observed presently, as if he were enumerating a noble sentiment that redounded vastly to his credit; "and I'll call round, as I said before, when I've done my day's work."

"But I say, miller," put in Jake, "don't you know t' bank's stopped, and the poor soul conna get her bit o' money to-day? Happen she'll never get it."

"My mill ain't stopped, and that's all as consarns me, Neighbour Jake. I'm a man as minds my own business and don't meddle."

"But this sin as has been sinned i' the midst on us isn't her sin," continued Jake, growing eloquent. "Give her time—a few days' grace. Happen things 'ull turn out better nor folks fancy; happen there'll be summat saved."

"I'll have my rent by sunset, as the law

declares it doo, or I'll put the brokers in by sunrise, come to-morrow. I'm a just man; I take what I've right to, and want no more."

"Try bein' a mercifoo' mon once in a way. Change is good for us a', and there's as much about him as about t'other chap i' Scripter," said Jake, feeling that the gift of words was on him, and no mistake. "Give her time, neighbour—give her time."

The miller looked hard and breathed hard at the little cobbler, thought he saw his chance of slipping him inside a cleft stick, and took it.

"If thee'l go surely for her, i' front of two witnesses, to pay double rent this day month, I'll give her the month's grace and leave the roof as she conna pay for over her head."

The child whom the widow held by the hand left his mother's side and came creeping round to Jake, finally catching hold of one side of the bronzed apron and holding on like a young leech.

"Done wi' you!" cried Jake, clapping one hand in the other. "I'll be round at your place at one o' the clock, so have your witnesses i' readiness. I'm a po'r man, but I can work extry, and t' fall of the year's best time for folk gettin' their boots fettled for winter, and orderin' new ones for Sundays."

But flour, not shoes and boots, being the miller's business, that worthy had taken himself off before Jake got to the end of his sentence.

As to Mrs. Bunnycastle, she had entirely subsided into herself and a rickety arm-chair by the fire.

"It is so little—so little!" sobbed the widow, wringing her hands. "Surely it could be worth no one's while to take the widow's mite."

"It all went along wi' the lot, I reckon," said Jake, "like big and little fishes i' a net, and favour showed to none."

"He held my hand in his," went on the poor woman, punctuating her sentences with sobs, "and 'Tilda,' says he, 'it's but a little, but it will keep a roof over your head.'"

"That was very kind and thoughtful on him," put in Jake, feeling that a few complimentary words anent the deceased Bunnycastle were called for; "he must have bin a good soart of a chap, must Bunnycastle, and a sorry loss to you and the little 'uns; but crying over spilt

milk never gathered it up i' the can again."

Then, suddenly conscious that his application of the proverb was indiscreetly vague, since it might apply either to the widow's mite or the departed Bunnycastle, Jake hastily took himself off.

True, he went home with an added burden on his lean shoulders, but cheered by the reflection that he had been of help in time of need.

And it really did seem as if the little cobbler's good angel were on the alert, for three or four country orders—big ones, too—came in before noon, while the boy developed a scornful demeanour towards his fellows, feeling the reflected importance of such a run of trade.

Jake sat stitching away on his low, broad, backless bench, giving a glance at the bank every now and then, and at the loiterers on the look-out for anything that might happen, many of them glad of an excuse to neglect their legitimate work, and wet the throats that grew dry with expectation at the bar of The Safe Retreat. Jake was not one of that sort. According to his ideas the day previous had been a thing altogether too unprecedented and stupendous to admit of divided attention. No man—no matter what his professional enthusiasm—could have heeled a shoe, or soled a boot, in the midst of such a turmoil as made the old market-place for all the world like a cauldron full of boiling water.

But the worst was known now; the people of Becklington had been asked to wait, and had given their word to wait, and the way for an honest man to wait was to do his work and see to his family.

Why, Amos Callender was down in the tan-yard half an hour earlier than his wont that morning, and Bess had a dish of smoking-hot black-puddings to cheer him up and keep his mind off troublous matters, all ready for dinner when he got back home.

"If you're down on your luck, you're down on your luck," said the honest tanner; "but you've no occasion to roll on it, and wallow in it like a pig i' mire. It's best to find yer feet and go ahead a bit, if so be as yo can."

And he was as good as his word too, helping many another to put a brave face on matters, and take patience till all should be made manifest.

But we are wandering from Jake stitching away for dear life, and feeling as if

every stitch, tightened to extremity of tension, was a fraction put by towards that double rent for which he was to go surety before two witnesses at one of the clock.

As he worked he sang, even as Hilda—poor Hilda—had lilted over her stocking-mending the morning before. But not like any sucking dove sung Jake, no half-hearted melody was his. He had a fine rasping voice, with a low tremulous note coming in every now and then, as a stitch had to be tightened.

The ditty that he sung was no languorous love-song, but a lordly song of triumph, a Methodist psalm of the most pronounced type :

My foes my footstool Thou shalt make,
And from their necks the stiffness take,
While I, on glory, full of pride,
As on a horse shall straddling ride.

Was the foe whose downfall Jake thus foretold a man who wore a flour-powdered coat, and earned his living by grinding corn? Who may say? Assuredly Jake sang with an edifying air of conviction, and as though that royal progress on a prancing steed of the name of Glory were a pageant even then passing before his mind's eye.

Many turned to look at the singer: one lingered, leaning against the low door of the shop, and daintily taking a pinch from a silver snuff-box. It was Dr. Turtle.

"A fine song that, Jake," he said; "but hardly suitable to the times we live in—eh?"

"I reckon it's fitter than you'd think for," answered Jake, bringing his awl to a standstill, and resting an elbow on his knee. "You see, doctor, times is bad—bad as bad. Well, the voice within me says: 'Jake, my fine fellow, rise above 'em, cast summat in their teeth, happen they'll flee before thee.'"

"Jake, you're a philosopher," said the doctor, taking another pinch, and gracefully waving his hand to a passing acquaintance.

"I don't know about that," said Jake, somewhat doubtful of phraseology too deep for him; "but I like a rousing song when I'm about it. Most of all I like arouser when my heart's i' my boots, run down so low it conna get no lower, loike t' weight i' the big clock over there when t' wants windin' up. Well, yon's a psalm as 'ud wind up ony man, if it's sung as it should be."

"It certainly holds out a cheerful prospect to the singer," said the doctor, with a

twinkle in his eye that Jake made believe not to notice.

"Well, doctor," he said, "when things be bad around, it's a help to look ahead and see the sun a shinin'. I tell you what it is," went on Jake, shoving his spectacles up among his hair, and looking round to make sure the boy wasn't listening; "things i' Becklington be about as bad as they can be. I was minded this mornin' to think as the end of all things was at hand."

"The end of the world?" said the doctor.

"Ay," said Jake, "the end o' the warld, and a' things in 't."

Dr. Turtle shook his head smilingly.

"No, no, Jake; let us not think such thoughts as these, with that fair young creature standing on the threshold of a long and glorious reign."

Here he took a long and emphatic pinch from the silver box, and drew a long and emphatic breath.

"Is it Queen Victory you're driving at?" said Jake, with his head on one side like an inquisitive bird. "Her as wur crowned i' the month when t' roses were a penny a bunch every market-day?"

"Yes, yes," cried the doctor with enthusiasm; "crowned in the month of roses—a foreshadowing, Jake, of the rosy pathway her feet are destined to tread."

"There's some of her subjec's as ain't havin' a rosy time of it just now down this way, anyhow," said Jake. "I reckon Queen Victory 'ud be main sorry if she knew how things be going in these parts—ay, that would she. She's a kindly face o' her own, and a gentle 'art in her bress to feel for them as is sad and sorry, has Queen Victory, and I wish as some chap were goin' up Lunnun way, and could tell her how the miller's for grinding more beside his corn. He'd get a tellin' orf, I reckon, as 'ud last him a' his loife, and learn to sing sma', bein' so rebuked by them as sit in high places."

Dr. Turtle had not heard the latter part of this discourse.

He was wrapped in a sort of wordless ecstasy—a delirium of loyalty, taking minute pinches of snuff airily, as though tossing off imaginary toasts. Was it not known in Becklington, from one end to the other, how devoted to the reigning girl-queen was that man of elegance, Dr. Turtle?

Jake thought it was high time to bring the doctor out of his reverie. Were there not many things to hear and to learn?

"You've had a baddish time of it lately, yourself, sir. It stands to reason it conna be a pleasant thing in a man to be lugged out of his warm bed in the middle of the night, to look at a drownded man's eyes starin' at nothin'."

"Mere accidents of the profession, Jake," said the doctor, dusting the frill of his shirt as he spoke; "mere accidents of the profession. But still, it was a sad sight—a sad sight! Then I had to go and break the event to Mr. Geoffrey, and he, naturally, felt it a good deal, the sad event being, as it is, so intimately connected with the bank robbery. Indeed (this is in confidence), I fear a relapse. It seemed to take great hold of him. As to his wife—a woman so fragile, Jake, you might blow her away like a feather—"

"If I wur Maister Geoffrey," put in Jake, "I'd give a mort o' money to the man as could blow hard enough—that would I. Why, she must cost him a fortune in doctor's stuff, let alone being such a wangling feckless kind of a body to have about the house."

"Well, well," said Dr. Turtle, gracefully waiving the delicate question of drugs, "she was terribly shattered, and the quantity of camphor-julep—— But tut, tut! I am talking shop, and that's against rule. Now, there's Mrs. Devenant—there's a woman for you! Hang me if she isn't a puzzler."

Jake had once more let his work fall upon his knee, pushed his spectacles up among the spikes of tow which he called his hair, and was listening keenly.

"Not a tear, Jake, not a tear, I give you my word; helped in the necessary investigations as if she'd been born and bred in the wards of an hospital. When I laid down the hand I had been holding and looked across at her, there she was looking like—well, let us say, like Lot's wife after that little misadventure of hers in the plains. 'He is dead,' she said, 'stone dead. I knew it from the first,' and then she stood there by the—well, let us say, the mortal remains, and everyone passed her by with a sort of creeping fear written in their faces. Not one uttered a

word of sympathy. I had the will to do it, but the words stuck in my throat, Jake—stuck in my throat."

"No wonder," said Jake, drawing a long breath; "sorrow must have turned her fierce. There's critters as goes like that when you take their young from 'em; they want to rend and tear all as come anigh 'em; a hard sorrer's a fearsome sight."

"Her eyes never seemed to be looking at us," continued the doctor, who had warmed to his theme, "but at something far away. The child had come creeping down the stairs in her little white night-dress, and someone was holding her back upon the lowermost stair; you could hear her moaning and crying out to be 'let go.' Ah, Jake! men in my profession need to have strong nerves. If a young fellow comes to me and says, 'Shall I enter the medical profession?' I answer his question by another: 'My very dear sir, the matter lies in a nut-shell. Have you strong nerves?'"

Then, with a cheery "Good-day to you!" away went the doctor to tell the story of Hester Devenant's steadfast, fearless, fierce, defiant grief to some one else.

The sheriff's enquiry took place soon after mid-day, and a verdict of "Suicide while in an unsound state of mind" was returned.

All this was interesting in no common degree, but paled before the reputed arrival of the Bow Street runner an hour or two later.

To-morrow promised to yield a plenteous harvest of intensely exciting events.

What chance had the tragedy enacting in the thatched cottage up among the dykes against such claims upon public interest?

The streets grew all at once full of stir and restless goings to and fro. Groups formed and loitered as they had done upon the day the robbery was discovered.

And secret evil-doers in the good town of Becklington went heavily, uneasily conscious that an unfamiliar and mighty power was in their midst, and that a sparkling bull's-eye of detection might be turned upon them at any moment, and a resistless arm drag forth their misdeeds into the light of day.